

“Jesus, the Pathfinder and the Oasis”

Luke 19:28-40

(Jesus instructs his friends where and how to walk—and **is** the destination.)

Preached by Carolyn Bohler  
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Redlands First United Methodist Church

[Image: Jesus riding in, on donkey, with crowd.]

The path was well trod. The road to Jerusalem was the Highway 10 of that day, except slower. [Image Fwy 10] (Well, come to think of it, the 10 is slow most of the time, too.) Poor and wealthy alike, lots of them, traveled the road to Jerusalem. Numerous kings and conquering generals over the years had traveled that path as they entered Jerusalem, welcomed by joyous crowds who sang hymns of welcome like we did today...

The way that the author of the Gospel of Luke tells the story, Jesus had acquired quite a few frequent flyer miles by this time. He had been traveling for quite a while—this entrance into Jerusalem is, for Jesus, [A different image of Jesus entering Jerusalem.] the culmination of a long journey he began when he went to Samaria. The journey included visiting Martha and Mary, healing numerous people, telling many parables, and blessing children.

Now Jesus entered Jerusalem hailed as a king. Yet Jesus rode on a donkey to symbolize his humility,<sup>1</sup> while children waved palm branches and strew their clothes on the path as a sign of hospitality. This kind of entrance procession was familiar in the first century—for kings, that is.

Jesus did not, in other words, “blaze this trail” to Jerusalem.

Others, plenty of others, had gone there before. Crowds had heralded, worshipped, and obeyed others before.

However—Jesus was, nevertheless, a Pathfinder.

For years, I had heard the word “pathfinder” without giving it much attention. Actually, I hate to think about it, [Image of pathfinder missile.] but I heard the word mostly in relation to “pathfinder missiles.” I never gave much thought to path finding, but I surely knew it meant, “Finding the way to some goal.”

[Image of sand and oasis.] For years, I have seen oases in movies or imagined them in my mind when people would lead guided meditations and ask us to imagine an oasis. However, my normal reverie never included an oasis, for I had never seen one. Some of you might say, about an oasis, “Been there, done that.” Plenty of you probably *have* seen an oasis, but I had not—until John and I started visiting our California deserts, about five or six years ago.

That’s when I came not only to understand, but to appreciate the meaning of both those terms--Pathfinder and Oasis.

[Image of 29 Palms.] It was actually on Thanksgiving Day 2005, when we drove to *29 Palms*, where I met my first oasis. *You* probably already know that the town is named *29 Palms* because there are exactly *29 Palms* at their oasis. We took a hike called “*The 49 Palms trail*.” Can you guess how many palm trees were at the end of that trail?

After that Thanksgiving desert experience John was persistent, and I am glad. He suggested that we take a few days off to get away—to Borrego Springs. The first hike we

took was the one everyone takes who hikes in Borrego. It was well trod. However, the next day we were more adventurous. We decided to take the trail up Hellhole Canyon. The description of that trail included this sentence: “Some bush whacking and boulder scaling required.” I was a little nervous. We didn’t have any whacking equipment. So, as we began the trail, we assured ourselves that we could turn around anytime we wanted to. Our *destination*, however, was, according to the hiking book—an oasis.

[Image of rocky area on trail.] The trail started out looking quite a bit like the path I imagine led into Jerusalem. It was a dirt trail, but wide—half a dozen people could walk side by side. There would have been no trouble fitting a donkey with a humble king riding on top and some kids alongside waving palm branches.

Then, the trail narrowed.

The trail description in the guidebook had mentioned that we would see a change in the flora as we climbed. We began to notice the smoke trees giving way to willows.

We reached a point when we did not know where the trail was. John said, “Wait here, I’ll check it out.” He went on up ahead one way, then came back saying, “I think I’ll try over there.” After he came back the second time, he proceeded to hike, without comment, so I assumed we were on the trail.

This happened several times until eventually John reported, when he came back from one of his scouting endeavors, that he was not at all certain that he was indeed finding *the* path, but that we were alongside the creek bed on the floor of the canyon and the goal, the oasis, would surely be in the *crevice*, where the canyon mountains came together. It didn’t exactly matter *how* we got there, as long we kept going up between the mountains in this narrow valley.

It was then that I realized what the word “pathfinder” meant. I was relying upon John **to go up ahead, to scout things out, and to show me the way to go. Pathfinder.**

Along the way, there were a few ferns and plants that it would seem might grow near an oasis. I sheepishly pondered aloud whether we might have arrived at the oasis. I would say, “Do you think we’re here yet? Are we near?”<sup>2</sup> John thought we would know *for sure* when we got there. So, we proceeded. We didn’t need to whack any weeds, but we did move quite a few limbs out of our way. We did need to scale a few boulders, but they weren’t that tall, and I had the advantage of just reaching for John’s hand and being pulled up, so it was easy for me!

On we journeyed. Then, [Image of Palm Trees.] voila! There it was—the oasis! A 15-foot high waterfall. Palm trees—I did not count them. A real oasis. We could not miss it. **We had arrived at the destination.**

[Image of waterfall.] If I had taken a helicopter to this spot, I might have *observed* that it was an oasis, but I would not have *felt* it to be an oasis. There is something about an oasis that requires a long journey to get there. **An oasis is an oasis in part because it has been a destination to reach.** It comes as a promise, a gift, a beautiful reward, a destination well worth the effort.

Jesus did not *blaze* the trail to Jerusalem. Others had gone before him.

Nevertheless, Jesus was a Pathfinder!

Jesus was a Pathfinder because he was not just *going* to Jerusalem; he was going somewhere else, too. He was on a donkey that no one else had ridden, going somewhere no one else had gone! Jesus rides into Jerusalem, but he is finding a Path towards an Oasis, a promise, a destination worth the effort.

[Image of road.] Everyone here is on a trail to some oasis. Probably most of us would appreciate a Pathfinder who could scout out our options for us.

- Some of you are blazing trails as you look for meaningful relationships. You want relationships that meet your dreams, your longings. You want others who affirm your abilities and goals, and you want to be a part of other people's journeys toward their dreams, with their abilities, toward their goals.
- Some of you have health concerns for which there are various medical choices to make. Do you do this or that? What path to take?
- Some of you are questioning your goals. What to do? Where? Why?
- Some of you, while sitting somewhat still in a pew, are at the very same time on a faith journey—wondering where it will lead you.

It would be very useful to have someone say, "Wait here, I'll check out the path ahead for you in a couple directions," someone who would be a Pathfinder on your journey to your Oasis—whether the destination is relationships, health, goals, or faith.

On this Palm Sunday, we might gain strength and courage—or, if we already have plenty strength and courage—we might gain fun and joy, if we were to consider Jesus as our Pathfinder. Something in the courage of Jesus' conviction, in his amazing compassion, in his centered assurance of God's help, helps us to feel confidence to keep hiking.

In this way, Jesus is not only our Pathfinder, but also our Helping Hand, who has already climbed the boulder and is reaching out for us to join hands to be lifted up. If the metaphor works for you, you could even think of the Christ (when you're in a difficult spot) as your Weed Whacker or your Foothold.

[Image of reflective lake oasis.] Jesus was heading into Jerusalem on a familiar trail, but he was blazing a trail toward an Oasis. He was not just going into Jerusalem for the Holy Day festivities. He was blazing a trail for humanity—with a new goal, a new destination. It is fair to call it an Oasis, for it's hard to get there without some strenuous journeying. It is fair to call it an Oasis, because it's a bit shockingly beautiful and surprising. He called it the Reign of God; we often call it the Kingdom of God.

It might also be called a state of "Shalom." Shalom is a Hebrew word that encompasses peace, wholeness, and health. Shalom is not just for individuals, but also for humanity.

This candle sits here every Sunday, as long as our country is at war to remind us gently of the goal of peace. Shalom (peace, wholeness, health) is the oasis toward which Jesus the Pathfinder blazed a new trail. Shalom is what he promised, both for individuals and for humanity. We might be tempted to stop on our difficult journeys, asking ourselves sheepishly "Are we there yet?" "Maybe this is it." Yet, we know that the Oasis for humanity is far more beautiful, more surprising, and more life giving than what we have yet seen in history. Collectively, we are not there yet—but we are still journeying.

[Image of uphill road in mountain.] Lucy once said: "Sometimes I get discouraged." Charlie Brown replied: "Well, Lucy, life does have its ups and downs, you know." Lucy responded: "But why? Why should it? Why can't my life be all 'ups'? If I want all 'ups' why can't I have them? Why can't I just move from one 'up' to an 'upper-up'? I don't want 'downs.' I just want 'ups' and 'ups' and 'ups.'"

Our lives probably include some ups and downs, too.

At least two things follow from considering Jesus as our Pathfinder and his promise as the Oasis or Reign of God, a time and place of peace and wholeness.

First, the Oasis is not likely to come to us. We have to do the traveling—even through ups and downs.

Second, we do not need to travel “**the** correct path.” As long as we stay focused, aiming in the direction of the Oasis, that is, as long as we stay within the **crevice of God’s love**, we’re bound to find the Oasis.

Nelson Mandela spent twenty years in jail on the way to his Oasis—but what a waterfall he led South Africa—and all humanity—to find!

We can name many who have endured all sorts of challenges on their journey—but who keep hiking toward an Oasis. Probably most of you are in that number.

Jesus had his ups and downs, big ones. Riding into Jerusalem on the donkey with all those people singing hymns and children waving palms must have been a big “high.” Yet, next Friday, we honor his going to the depths through crucifixion. After that Easter is one huge Oasis that we will not be able to miss, when we get there, and it *will* arrive.

[Original image of Jesus and crowd.] Jesus rode into Jerusalem. He did not blaze that trail, but he was a Pathfinder, and the Oasis he has helped humanity to climb toward is still there, waiting for us to arrive.

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<sup>1</sup> This fulfills a prophecy of Zech 9:9...Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey...

<sup>2</sup> Notice that in the story, there is a repeated use of the verb “to draw near.” It is as if the gospel writer is telling us, the reader, and perhaps Jesus was telling his entourage, “This is getting near.”